

OPINIONS

Catholic Courier

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Letters Policy

The Catholic Courier wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the letter writers' opinions.

Letters must not exceed 500 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

Single-issue activism has not worked

To the editors:

It is not enough to be anti-abortion. Nor is it enough to be solely anti-death penalty, or strictly against war or preoccupied only with economic injustice or euthanasia. And it is most destructive to advance any of those causes at the expense of the consistent life ethic movement. Single issue activists need to take an honest look at where we are despite the work of the past 25 years:

- Abortions continue to be performed at the rate of 1.5 million per year in the U.S. Chemical abortifacients are only months away from common use. An override of the partial birth abortion ban veto is uncertain.

- Our cities are plagued by chronic unemployment, inadequate housing and failing infrastructure while billions are invested in off-shore factories that pay slave wages and degrade the environment.

- Higher rates of civilian casualties occurred in the Gulf War than in any other war. Our government resists investigating health effects on Gulf War veterans and is attempting to cut benefits to veterans.

- Euthanasia is protected by the courts and promoted as an alternative to failing health and escalating medical costs.

- The U.S. has one of the highest crime rates of the industrialized countries despite 4,400 people sentenced to death in the past 20 years and high rates of incarceration. ...

Diffusion of energy occurs when attention is focused upon only one issue. Legislators are inundated by an endless stream of special interest social activists. Each of the issues may be critically important to the affected population, however each issue isolated from the others does not have enough impact to be determinant in shaping the laws of the land. Single issues are disregarded as the interest of a few extremists. The synergy of broad spectrum activism is never realized.

There are common and complex spiritual, historical and economic dimensions to the aforementioned problems. When that commonality is ignored, solutions proposed are frequently simplistic and consequently disregarded. A caricature of the antiabortion activist is quickly drawn

when the activist is not willing to challenge the economics of our society which lets 15% of its children grow up in poverty. The outspoken defender of death row inmates is easily dismissed when no protection is offered to the innocent preborn human being. None of the problems will be solved without leadership acknowledging economic excesses in our society.

When the consistent ethic of life is subordinated to single issue division, ineffectiveness is the result. We are privileged to be in a Diocese committed to the unborn and born, the guilty and innocent, the rich and welfare recipient, the infirm and healthy. Single issue activists must not let the limited power, recognition, or social attachments accrued through the years, prevent them from contributing to the consistent ethic of life movement. The consistent ethic of life movement is the only movement with the capability of moving our culture from that which embraces death, to a more Christ centered society.

Jann K. Armantrout
Webster

Separating issues weakens support for all

To the editors:

Thanks for printing Rob Cullivan's article about Father Paul Marx in the May 23 issue. I agree fully with Father Marx's positions which are nothing more than Church teaching. He has been a tireless advocate for the unborn.

Even Father Marx is not beyond criticism, as I discovered from Suzanne Schnittman's letter in the May 30 issue. Given the description of her meeting with Father Marx, I agree with her criticisms of him. Apparently he can be somewhat antagonistic to those whose pro-life efforts are broader than his focus on abortion and, to quote the letter, "... he expressed concern that concentration on the broad advocacy for life that the Consistent Life Ethic urges diminishes the efforts to eradicate abortion."

I hope the "focus" of Father Marx will at least succeed in maintaining present Church teaching on abortion and contraception. We should be aware, however, that on other issues teaching and tradition have changed to accommodate the prevailing culture. Most drastic was the

change in the earliest tradition of non-violence and non-participation in war. This tradition was subverted most notably by Emperor Constantine who first "legalized" Christianity and "Christianized" his armies. Just war theory later served to rationalize philosophically the greatest change ever in Christian outlook. Though it provided only a small loophole to allow Christians to kill, just war gave prerogative to the emperor and opened the gates for 1,600 years of Christian bloodshed. We can hardly be surprised when the state takes prerogative in legalizing abortion.

To sharpen the issue: in the Gulf War the lives of women and their unborn babies were aborted by U.S. "surgical strikes" as surely as lives back home were aborted by surgeons' scalpels and the evils of an over-militarized society. Apparently, Father Marx does not make these connections ... Sadly, some of those who wrote to criticize Ms. Schnittman do not either.

The point is, of course, the life issues are so connected that they stand or fall together. If we persist in making seams in Jesus' garment where there are none, I

fear the Church may end up abandoning Jesus on the abortion issue as it once did on war. We will certainly have less chance to effect the rest of society. While Father Marx shuns the Consistent Life Ethic, some anti-abortion groups such as his Human Life International do maintain questionable relationships with groups that espouse right wing political agendas. This certainly diminishes anti-abortion efforts and belies the focus on abortion that has been attributed to Father Marx.

An important point for those committed to a CLE is we can hardly begin to speak of having an ethic based on Jesus and the Gospels until those who have teaching authority in the Church re-examine our ambiguous teaching on war. At least the teaching on abortion is still clear.

Ms. Schnittman needs much courage, love and wisdom in her difficult job. I'm praying for that as well as reconciliation with her critics. There is no doubt she remains an active and very effective advocate for the unborn.

Mark Scibilia-Carver
Cold Springs Road, Trumansburg

Prolife activists should focus on causes of abortion

To the editors:

It's time for a wake-up call! Yes, "Pro-Life" relates to the unborn, but it is more than that. It applies to those already born as well - you, me, every person on this planet. Every child of God! Being pro-life is what the Consistent Ethic of Life is all about.

The problem is that those who stand shouting in front of abortion clinics - the pros and the cons - are getting nowhere and will get nowhere. This is a poor simile but it is a little like "locking the barn after the horse has been stolen."

On June 27, the Rochester *Times-Union* published a picture of Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry kneeling outside Governor Pataki's office. About two dozen protesters were with him and Terry prayed, "We pray, Lord Jesus, for you to purge the evil from our State Capitol. It has become a den of evil and iniquitous adulterers and liars and thieves and power-mongers." Whew! That's pretty strong. Did it have any positive effect? I think not.

One of your readers said that it is important to have a "focus," to be "one issue" people in the fight against abortion. Great! But, if the focus is on a woman/girl already pregnant, and there is name calling, that focus is wrong. The emphasis should be on the root causes of the problem; not after the fact so much, but be-

fore the fact.

We must stop to consider why women have presented themselves for abortion. The sadness. Pregnancy because of abuse, for example. Abuse is insidious and far more prevalent than we can imagine - sexual, physical and emotional; and sometimes emotional abuse can be the worst kind of abuse. Economic circumstances. Girls impregnated by older men. All sorts of reasons. It is not a female problem. It goes across the whole spectrum of life.

The cure is not at the abortion clinic; it is in the realm of all those areas covered by our Consistent Life Ethic - economic and social justice, teaching children from

early age, getting women and some men out of abusive situations, teaching parents to parent, etc., etc. If people like Father Marx and Right to Lifers will focus on curing social ills, they will lessen or stop the need for women to ask for abortions.

There is a movement between pro-choice and pro-life factions to reach for a Common Ground, which I think is a good beginning. I urge that the *Catholic Courier* print an article about it.

Suzanne Schnittman is right! The Consistent Life Ethic is the way to go.

Grace B. Carnes
Eagle Ridge Circle
Rochester

Father Marx asserts he was misrepresented

To the editors:

Someone sent me a copy of the *Catholic Courier* for June 20. Allow me to make a few points:

1. The letter of Suzanne Schnittman of May 30 falsely presented my views "on diocesan efforts to pursue Catholic teaching on life issues in a non-violent manner."

2. I have known Father Weslin for years and I cannot imagine him being "closely associated with individuals who advocate the murder of physicians who do abortions" as Ellen J. Gertzog of Planned Parenthood asserted.

Ellen Gertzog should be the last person to talk about "inflammatory rhetoric" and "violence." Her organization, Planned Parenthood, admits to having killed 230,000 babies last year with great profit!

Father Paul Marx, OSB
Human Life International
Front Royal, Virginia

Editors' note:

Barring new developments, these are the last letters we will publish on this topic.